

Negotiating liminality following life transitions: Reflexive bricolage and liminal hotspots

Kerrane, K., Lindridge, A. & Dibb, S.

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Negotiating liminality following life transitions: Reflexive bricolage and liminal hotspots

Abstract

Purpose

The paper investigates how consumption linked with life transitions can differ in its potential to bring about ongoing liminality. By examining how consumers can draw on overlapping systems of resources, different ways in which consumers negotiate ongoing liminality following the transition to motherhood are identified.

Design/methodology/approach

The authors conducted an interpretive, exploratory study using in-depth phenomenological interviews with 23 South Asian mothers living in the UK. The sample consisted of mothers at different stages of motherhood.

Findings

Following life transitions, consumers may encounter liminal hotspots at the intersection of overlapping systems of resources. The findings examine two liminal hotspots with differing potential to produce ongoing liminality. The study shows how consumers navigate these liminal hotspots in different ways, by accepting, rejecting and amalgamating the resources at hand.

Research limitations/implications

The research sample could have been more diverse; future research could examine liminal hotspots relating to different minority groups and life transitions.

Practical implications

Marketers need to examine the different ways in which consumers draw on different systems of resources following life transitions. The paper includes implications for how marketers segment, target and market to ethnic minority consumers.

Originality/value

Due to increasingly fluid social conditions, there are likely to be growing numbers of consumers who experience ongoing liminality following life transitions. A preliminary framework is presented outlining different ways that consumers negotiate ongoing liminality by drawing on overlapping systems of resources, broadening our understanding of the role that marketplace resources play beyond life transitions.

Keywords: Identity, Transition, Motherhood, Ethnic minorities, Consumption

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

Late-modern life is characterised by fluid social conditions and loose social structures known as ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman, 2000), produced by the affordability of global travel, migration of labour and instantaneous communication (Chu et al., 2018). As a result, it is imperative that marketers understand how consumers experience and manage identity transitions in complex conditions that can perpetuate ‘a state of constant movement’ and ‘uncertainty’ (Ulver and Ostberg, 2014:834). Whilst consumer research has examined how people use consumption to negotiate new identities (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk 1988), particularly during life transitions (Cody and Lawler, 2011; Hogg et al., 2004; McAlexander, 1991), we know less about how consumption during life transitions perpetuates ongoing uncertainty in consumers’ identity negotiations (Phillips and Broderick, 2014). In order to ensure effective, responsible marketing communication and avoid ‘static categorisation and segmentation’ (Ulver and Ostberg, 2014: 833), marketers need to understand how consumers negotiate ongoing uncertainty following life transitions, and the different ways in which uncertainty affects consumption patterns.

Marketing theory has made use of Van Gennep’s (1960) and Turner’s (1969) work on liminality to understand processes of life transition and transformation (Cody and Lawler, 2011; Hirschman et al. 2012; Noble and Walker, 1997; Schouten, 1991). Scholars have examined how consumption plays a complex role in these processes, from easing liminality and uncertainty (Cody, 2012; Patrick et al., 2002; Solomon, 1983) to heightening or causing liminality (Thomsen and Sorensen, 2006; Voice Group, 2010a). Within consumer research (Ogle et al., 2013; Thomsen and Sorensen, 2006; Phillips and Broderick, 2014; Voice Group 2010a; 2010b), the context of motherhood has proved a particularly fruitful context in which to capture the nuances of liminality, offering insights into the ambivalent effects of consumption during transitional periods. For example, mothers may experience consumption uncertainty, whilst feeling the need to be ‘ready for the baby’ (Voice Group 2010a:389). We

define liminality as the uncertainty of being ‘betwixt and between’, when consumers undergo significant upheaval and transformation as they negotiate new identities (Cody and Lawler, 2011; Hirschman et al. 2012; Noble and Walker, 1997; Schouten, 1991; Voice Group 2010a). This definition suggests that liminality does not always represent a linear process that becomes ‘solved’ at the end of a transitional phase (Cappellini and Yen 2016:1279), but instead can be experienced by consumers as an ‘ongoing’ condition (Cappellini and Yen, 2016; Hirschman et al., 2012; Phillips and Broderick, 2014).

However, the relationship between liminality during life transitions and the emergence of ongoing liminality remains under-theorised. While scholars from various disciplinary fields have examined permanent liminality as a central feature of late modernity (Bamber et al., 2017; Johnsen and Sorensen, 2015; Szokolczai, 2003), relatively little consumer research has examined how identity transitions can engender ongoing liminality (Cappellini and Yen, 2016; Phillips and Broderick, 2014; Ulver and Ostberg, 2014). Ongoing liminality is particularly relevant for ethnic minority mothers who, as consumers, experience and manage identity transitions in complex conditions, negotiating their identities amidst feelings of being ‘constantly in-between different spaces of mothering’ (Cappellini and Yen, 2016:1279).

In this paper, we draw on the experiences of ethnic minority mothers at different stages of mothering to examine how consumption during the transition to motherhood can vary in its potential to precipitate ongoing liminality. Whilst most mothers share a sense of change and uncertainty, these feelings and experiences can be intensified for ethnic minority women who are mothering across cultures. Through their mothering practices these mothers must also navigate ‘amongst different acculturation outcomes’ such as maintaining home culture, integrating both cultures or resisting host culture (Berry, 1997; Cappellini and Yen, 2016: 1270). Feelings of being ‘in-between’ can be intensified for these mothers, who must negotiate contrasting cultural values surrounding motherhood, as well as the wider family relationship

with their children. Although one of the few studies of ethnic minority mothers found that mothering between two cultures can beget ongoing liminality (Cappellini and Yen, 2016), ethnic minority mothers' experiences of liminality remain poorly understood (Ogle et al., 2013; Phillips and Broderick, 2014).

We extend existing marketing theory by examining the relationship between the transition to motherhood and the emergence of ongoing liminality for a sample of ethnic minority mothers at different stages of mothering. We take as our starting point the notion that motherhood is a 'fluid process' in which 'uncertainties and anxieties' surrounding the negotiation of new identities are not solved at the end of the liminal phase (i.e. birth), but persist to different degrees over time (Bailey, 1999; Cappellini and Yen, 2016: 1279; Phillips and Broderick, 2014).

Our article makes three important contributions to marketing theory. First, by drawing on the concept of liminal hotspots (Greco and Stenner, 2017), we contribute to marketing scholarship on how consumers experience identity transitions and liminality in late modernity (Cody and Lawler, 2011; Hogg et al., 2004; Ulver and Ostberg, 2014), particularly research on motherhood (Ogle et al., 2013; Phillips and Broderick, 2014; Tonner, 2016) and ethnic minority mothers (Cappellini and Yen, 2016). We offer a means of theorising how liminality during the transition to motherhood can vary in its potential to become permanent. Our findings extend our understanding of ongoing liminality (Phillips and Broderick, 2014) by showing how informants dealt with uncertainty relating to nesting consumption by choosing to delay purchasing prams and other expensive baby products until after birth, once they knew what to purchase, or sourcing products as gifts from family members.

Second, by incorporating a reflexive bricolage approach to identity (Cronin and Malone, 2018; Hester 2005) to examine the different ways in which consumers negotiate two different liminal

hotspots, we extend existing research on life transitions and bricolage (Tonner, 2016; Ritch and Brownlie, 2016). We find that informants drew on different systems of resources to negotiate ongoing liminality, including the marketplace, medical/expert advice system and family resource system. Our findings show that negotiating competing forms of advice can precipitate ongoing liminality, as mothers negotiate overlapping norms of good mothering across two cultures.

Finally, we extend existing research on ethnic-minority mothers' experiences of ongoing liminality (Cappellini and Yen, 2016), by showing how minimally liminal hotspots require different forms of reflexive bricolage than hotspots with a higher potential to become permanent. We show how more intense hotspots, such as competing forms of expert advice on mothering, may require a transformative shift in perspective (Greco and Stenner, 2017) *and* the ability to amalgamate a variety of different resources to generate new meanings and identities. We show how multiple (online and offline) support networks provided an important space for informants to evaluate different forms of advice. Since late modernity is increasingly characterised by fluidity (Bauman 2000), 'perpetual metastability' (Deleuze 1992), and global cultural flows (Jafari and Goulding, 2013) that are likely to proliferate permanent liminality, our paper offers important insight into how consumers negotiate the dynamics of liminal hotspots (Greco and Stenner, 2017).

Our theoretical approach enables us to identify several practical implications. Marketers need to understand how consumers continue to experience uncertainty beyond life transitions. We show how consumers continue to alter their consumption patterns, such as by circumventing or delaying re-entry into the marketplace. Contemporary consumers are in a constant state of 'becoming' and may fit less readily within homogenous groups (Ulver and Ostberg, 2014: 834). In particular, marketing practitioners need a nuanced understanding of how consumers from minorities experience ongoing liminality, in order to support (and represent) ethnic minority

women as they develop new identities as competent mothers (Lindridge et al., 2016). To ensure effective marketing programmes, marketers need to understand the different systems of resources that ethnic minority consumers draw on (e.g. family system, medical/expert advice system, as well as the marketplace). Marketing practitioners need to minimise negative impacts from marketing communications for consumers from minority groups. This issue is especially timely given the roles played by marketers, advertising agencies, media and clients, in perpetuating wider gender and ethnic stereotypes remain under scrutiny (Cappellini and Yen, 2016; Tuncay Zayer and Coleman, 2015).

Furthermore, marketing practitioners are increasingly expected to adopt a responsible approach in how they segment, target and market to consumers. Recognising diversity within different consumption experiences, such as for ethnic minority mothers, is central to this responsibility. When segmenting and targeting consumers, marketers need to understand the dynamic ways in which consumers engage with intersecting and competing systems of resources, by engaging with multiple support networks. Marketing managers and policy makers might consider their role in developing support networks, which provide discursive spaces where mothers learn to amalgamate and question different forms of advice (Cruz and Buchanan-Oliver, 2017).

The article is organised as follows: first, we provide an overview of existing research on liminality, motherhood and consumption. Next, we discern our theoretical approach to understanding the emergence and negotiation of ongoing liminality, before outlining our methodology. In the findings and discussion section, we explore how consumers in transition can be understood as reflexive bricoleurs who draw on different systems of resources to negotiate two liminal hotspots of differing potential. We conclude by discussing the implications of our argument for marketing theorists and practitioners, as well as the limitations and implications for future research.

Liminality, motherhood and consumption

In order to understand the role of consumption during identity transitions, consumer research typically draws on the concept of ‘liminality’ (Schouten 1991), an anthropological concept that helps understand the complexities of identity construction during periods of change. Liminality suggests that during transitional phases our identities are suspended and undergo re-construction (Noble and Walker, 1997; Schouten, 1991). Early consumer research on transitions, liminality and identity (Noble and Walker, 1997; Schouten, 1991; Solomon, 1983) regarded consumption as a means of easing or reducing liminality, by offering an array of marketplace opportunities for consumers to negotiate new identities. However, research on the transition to motherhood found that consumption can also exacerbate liminality by causing heightened feelings of ambivalence and vulnerability (Ogle et al., 2013; Voice Group, 2010a).

The transition to motherhood is widely recognised as a major transition, during which consumption typically generates symbolic meanings for new mothers (Banister and Hogg, 2006; Prothero, 2002). New mothers are expected to engage in ‘nesting’ consumption, by purchasing the (many) appropriate baby products in readiness for the baby’s arrival (Afflerback et al., 2014; Miller, 2014). For example, they can perform their identities as good mothers through buying the ‘right pram’ (Thomsen and Sorensen, 2006:920). Mothers are also deemed responsible for ensuring the safety and development of their baby/child, with consumption again playing a key role (Voice Group, 2010b). Even prior to conception, women who are trying to conceive are advised to consume expert advice and modify their consumption choices, such as by taking folic acid supplements and avoiding ‘risky’ smoking or drinking (Gram et al., 2016; Lupton, 2011).

Yet women may not always know how to consume through this transitional phase, and although some women embrace the offerings of the marketplace, others may feel overwhelmed

(Carrigan and Szmigin, 2004). Studies of first-time mothers highlight the complex, 'problematic and ambivalent role' that consumption can play in identity transitions (Voice Group, 2010a:393; Thomsen and Sorensen, 2006). For expectant mothers, the intensity of the expectation to 'accumulate the right things' in readiness for the birth can exacerbate feelings of ambivalence and insecurity caused by their in-between status (Voice Group 2010a:383). Products such as prams (Thomsen and Sorensen, 2006) and maternity dresses (Ogle et al., 2013) symbolise both former and future selves, which can heighten consumer vulnerability and uncertainty. However, we know less about how mothers negotiate ongoing liminality that may persist beyond the birth of their first child.

Recent research suggests that liminality is not a linear, uni-directional process, in which liminality becomes 'solved', but rather an 'ongoing' negotiation of identity (Cappellini and Yen, 2016; Hirschman et al., 2012; Loacker and Sullivan, 2016; Phillips and Broderick, 2014: 1040). Perhaps more alarmingly, Cappellini and Yen's (2016:1279-80) study of liminality and ethnic minority mothers finds that 'doing mothering across cultures' can intensify consumers' sense of 'being out of place'. They suggest that some mothers may experience liminality 'as a permanent condition' which renders them in a 'constant state of uncertainties and anxieties' that exemplifies 'the liminal state' (Cappellini and Yen, 2016:1279). While their findings highlight how little is known about ethnic minority mothers' experiences, their study focuses on everyday mothering, rather than examining how such liminality relates to the transition to motherhood. The relationship between liminality during the transition to motherhood and the emergence of ongoing liminality remains under-explored.

Several scholars (Cronin and Malone, 2018; Ritch and Brownlie, 2016; Tonner, 2016) have considered the role of bricolage in negotiating identity. Tonner (2016:116) shows how new mothers can draw on an array of available maternal services 'for exploring their liminal experiences'. These findings are pertinent, since they suggest that liminal consumers' ability

to draw on different resources might shape how they negotiate liminality. While the mothers in Tonner's (2016:113, 116) study experienced ambivalence and vulnerability, they were also 'largely resourceful', becoming 'bricoleurs' who learned to interweave conflicting meanings into their liminal identity. The study (2016:105) examined the experiences of white 'urban, working women' who were 'considered to have limited family support'. The focus of Tonner's (2016:104) research was largely on these mothers' consumption of 'private SME motherhood services' (e.g. hypnobirthing, baby massage) and NHS services (e.g. ultrasounds, breastfeeding groups). However, we know less about how ethnic minority mothers act as bricoleurs, and the complex ways in which they draw on different systems of resources to negotiate their experiences of ongoing liminality. We extend Tonner's (2016) findings by examining how a sample of ethnic minority mothers engage in wider forms of bricolage, including expert advice from formal maternal services, marketplace resources, as well as family and other support networks. Together, the concepts of bricolage and liminal hotspots are used to theorise consumers as reflexive bricoleurs, and to examine how they negotiate the potential for ongoing liminality to emerge following life transitions.

Theorising the emergence of ongoing liminality: liminal hotspots and reflexive bricolage

Liminality was originally used by Van Gennep (1909/1960) to understand the process of transition from one status to another. He outlines three key stages through which individuals pass: the separation phase, the transitional or liminal phase, and the reintegration phase. Van Gennep (1909/1960) viewed society as a house divided into rooms and passageways, with rites of passage marking when individuals pass from one room to another. During the separation phase, individuals separate themselves from their previous status (or room). The transitional or liminal phase is the passageway between rooms, when individuals experience significant upheaval and uncertainty. The liminal phase ends when the individual passes into a new room, which represents reintegration into society, as the individual becomes familiar with their new

life role. Liminality was further elaborated by Turner (1967), as a betwixt and between phase in which the normal rules of society are suspended. Here, the liminal phase is characterised by both ambiguity and transformation, as individuals experience social exclusion, yet can explore the possibility of new identities. For example, Turner (1967) suggested that in some societies the transition from childhood to adulthood involves adolescents' separation from the village, the practising of puberty rites, followed by their return to the village as adults.

Yet in contemporary societies, the 'internal partitions' between rooms become 'thinner' (Van Gennep, 1909/1960), and late modern societies are becoming more 'open plan' (Greco and Stenner, 2017). Scholars from a variety of different fields have examined how late modern life is increasingly characterised by permanent liminality (Bamber et al., 2017; Bianchi and Fuskova, 2017; Johnsen and Sorensen, 2015; Szokolczai, 2003). For example, Greco and Stenner (2017:116) argued that 'disciplined social systems which once seemed so stable and internally coherent are increasingly emphasising transience, flexible interconnection, and agility as their only permanent attributes'. Periods of transition were once demarcated by rituals and relatively stable social roles (Turner, 1969). However, in contemporary society, people are increasingly likely to experience prolonged periods of transition, as shifting social norms and fluid identity positions may result in transitions that lack a clearly defined end-state (Barrios et al., 2012; Chu et al., 2018).

Recent studies in marketing and consumer research have examined spaces of ongoing liminality (Cappellini and Yen, 2016; Hirschman et al., 2012; O'Leary et al., 2018; Roux et al., 2018). For example, garages (Hirschman et al., 2012), roads (O'Leary et al., 2018) and sidewalks (Roux et al., 2018) can be understood as liminal spaces in everyday life, in which objects take on mixed states, acting as symbols for both former and potential future selves. Wine promoters (Smith Maguire, 2010) and branders (Loacker and Sullivan, 2016) learn to reflexively occupy persistently liminal identity positions. These studies show how a less-

structural view of liminality can help us to understand liminality as a ‘multidirectional’ feature of everyday life (Cappellini and Yen, 2016; Hirschman et al., 2012:371). Our approach to liminality takes inspiration from these more dynamic approaches to liminality, as we seek to further our understanding of the relationship between the transition to motherhood and ongoing liminality (Cappellini and Yen, 2016; Phillips and Broderick, 2014).

We draw on Greco and Stenner’s (2017) concept of ‘liminal hotspots’ to help theorise the dynamics of occasions of persistent liminality (Greco and Stenner, 2017). A liminal hotspot is ‘an occasion characterised by the experience of being trapped’ in an ‘interstitial dimension’ (Greco and Stenner, 2017:152). In liminal hotspots, the feelings of ambiguity and uncertainty that characterise transitional events ‘acquire an enduring quality’ in which people feel ‘caught suspended’ (Stenner et al., 2017:141-142). They not only refer to stalled transitions but may also encompass ‘phenomena whose features are not adequately grasped by the norms of intelligibility’ associated with established life events and transitions (Greco and Stenner, 2017:152). For example, liminal hotspots can occur as part of ‘flows of migration that yield hybrid identities’ (Bianchi and Fuskova, 2018:189), or when working mothers struggle to negotiate the norms of intensive mothering (Martsin, 2018).

Based on this ‘liminal hotspot’ approach to liminality, the ethnic minority mothers in Cappellini and Yen’s (2016) study might be perceived as negotiating a liminal hotspot in which they learn to cope with the uncertainty of how to mother between two cultures. Their informants’ use of an online community of mainly Taiwanese mothers living in UK seemed to exacerbate their feeling of being ‘out of place’ (Cappellini and Yen, 2016:1279). The mothers found themselves in a liminal hotspot that created ‘a permanent liminal darkness’ (Cappellini and Yen, 2016:1261). Their use of this collective consumption space appeared to heighten their experiences of paradox and paralysis, rendering them in a ‘constant state of uncertainties and anxieties’ (Cappellini and Yen, 2016:1261; 1279).

Yet Greco and Stenner (2017:154) have illustrated how liminal hotspots can vary in their likelihood to become permanent, suggesting that there are different ways in which hotspots can be negotiated, or ‘deparadoxified’. Minimally liminal hotspots can be deparadoxified relatively easily in two ways: by spatially and temporally ‘restoring boundaries that return the liminal paradox to an orthodox logic of either/or’ (Greco and Stenner, 2017:154). However, when liminal hotspots cannot be deparadoxified quickly and easily, and they occur in liminal phases that are ‘personally transformative and/or socially consequential’, liminality is likely to persist (Greco and Stenner, 2017:156). Ongoing liminality has both the potential to generate negative ‘swamping’ feelings as well as more ‘positive and creative’ possibilities (Greco and Stenner, 2017). Liminal hotspots can be transformative, but they require a ‘change in perspective’ or ‘pattern shift’ that enables people to re-signify their experiences and find new ways of ‘living the paradox’ (Greco and Stenner, 2017:159; 162).

Although Greco and Stenner (2017:159) recognise that pattern shift involves learning to embrace a ‘higher order of complexity’, the ways in people can engage in such a shift is less clear. Little is known about how ethnic minority mothers negotiate liminal hotspots, and how they might engage in pattern shift to make sense of their new identities as mothers at the intersection of two cultures. We supplement the theory of liminal hotspots with insights from a bricolage approach (Tonner 2016), which enables us to understand how consumers’ ability to draw on multiple systems of resources shapes how they negotiate liminal hotspots.

We draw on the terms bricolage and bricoleur to understand how consumers learn to select, discard and interweave resources available to them (Cronin and Malone, 2018; Hester, 2005; Tonner, 2016). As bricoleurs, consumers can create their own ‘toolboxes of resources for making sense of events’ (Hester, 2005:83). In ‘making do’ with the resources ‘at hand’, bricoleurs can generate new understandings based on their ability to compile and recombine different resources (Hester, 2005:82). If bricolage enables consumers to draw on readily

available resources to generate new understandings, they can engage in deparadoxification and even in pattern shift to negotiate liminal hotspots. We view bricolage as a reflexive practice, which enables consumers to be ‘discoverers of their own paths’ (Cronin and Malone, 2018; de Certeau, 1984:xviii). We examine how consumers can engage in bricolage in ways that are reflexive, but not necessarily ‘unruly’ (Brownlie and Hewer, 2009), or seeking to justify a ‘tactical manipulation of ideologies’ (Cronin and Malone, 2018:5). Nor do we suggest that consumers are ‘postmodern bricoleurs’ who are free to choose whatever resources they want (Altglass, 2014:479). Rather, we examine how consumers ‘make do’ with the different systems of resources available to negotiate liminal hotspots of differing potential (Altglass, 2014:476; Cronin and Malone, 2018; Rindova et al., 2011).

Method

The empirical material stems from in-depth interviews with 23 mothers of South Asian heritage living in the UK, who were pregnant or had at least one baby/child (aged 0-7 years). Ethnicity is regarded here not as a ‘given’ but as a social category that is in a constant state of production and negotiation with other forms of difference (Brah 2010). Use was made of social categories of ethnicity, race and religion, whilst recognising the issues associated with these dominant terms (Hall 1996). As Hall (1996) notes, although using these terms may be problematic, they are yet to be replaced. At the most recent UK census in 2011, almost 5% of the UK population identified as South Asian (ONS, 2012). In this study, the term ‘South Asian’ encompasses several different ethnicities and religions (see Table 1).

Table 1

[INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE]

The main data collection period took place from August 2014 to November 2015. Informants were recruited mainly from the north west of England, via personal contacts, snowball sampling, South Asian community and women's groups, and other relevant websites and organisations. Our sampling criteria included women who were either expectant or had children of primary school age. Most informants identified as second-generation Muslim women of Indian or Pakistani heritage, although some first-generation informants who were proficient and comfortable to be interviewed in English were also recruited. Most informants were educated to at least graduate level, including all the first-generation informants. The majority of informants were working women when they became pregnant, most of whom had returned to paid work/study after their maternity leave.

We used in-depth phenomenological interviews, which were deemed appropriate given the ease of conducting them when researching an 'unfamiliar' cultural context, in which 'everything is new and different' (Belk et al., 2013:32). Most interviews were carried out face-to-face in the informants' preferred location (the majority of women chose their home, two informants chose a café, and another chose her workplace). However, we adopted a pragmatic approach to remote interviewing in response to informants' preferences (e.g. the necessities of busy family schedules), as well as the practicalities of travelling to more distant locations (King and Horrocks 2010); three informants preferred to be interviewed by telephone and two chose Skype.

The interviews were carried out by the first author, who is a white, middle-class British woman and mother of two young children. As such, some informants may have been wary of speaking to a non-South Asian researcher, whom they may have assumed knew very little about their culture, religion, family structure, and suchlike (Ryan et al., 2011). However, the first author did share 'some common basis of understanding' (Belk et al., 2013:32) as a woman and a mother, and this common ground seemed to encourage informants to feel at ease and to reflect

on their lived experiences. Being able to empathise with informants about becoming a mother helped to establish trust and rapport with informants. When conducting the interviews, informants were prepared to give detailed accounts of their upbringing and seemed to regard her as occupying a neutral position as a naïve outsider, perhaps speaking more freely than if she had been a member of a South Asian community. Using in-depth phenomenological interviews, underpinned by a social constructionist worldview, helped to position informants as ‘the expert on her own experiences’ (Thompson et al., 1989:138).

In total, 43 hours of interview data were generated. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, enabling a rich description of informants’ lived experiences to emerge. A conversational style was adopted, beginning with ‘grand-tour’ questions (McCracken, 1988) regarding informants’ family background, education and career, enabling informants to lead discussions of their journey to becoming a mother. Informants were asked to talk about several broad areas relating to motherhood, such as their experiences of pregnancy and preparing for motherhood/birth, early experiences of motherhood, returning to work and everyday mothering practices. Interviews continued until the research team was satisfied that data saturation had been reached.

The data was interpreted using thematic analysis, in which themes were data-driven and data was not coded to fit a pre-determined coding frame (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Initially, transcripts were read several times, alongside the recording in the first instance. The familiarisation process involved taking notes, searching for patterns of meaning and highlighting areas of potential interest in the data. After becoming familiar with the data, the process of generating initial codes began, using emic coding that drew directly on the language used by informants (Belk et al., 2013), which enabled us to achieve both ‘explanation and naïve understanding’ (Tonner, 2016:107). In order to manage the data and coding process more effectively, NVivo was used. Having developed an initial set of codes, the iterative process of

searching for themes across the data was undertaken. Codes were gathered around emerging themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006), then were ‘challenged and modified with each iterative turn’ (Thompson and Üstüner, 2015:243). The hermeneutic process of interpretation also involved circling back and forth between relevant literatures (Thompson et al., 1989). This iterative process, or ‘hermeneutic circle’, is a common feature of analysis in existential phenomenology (Hirschman, 1986:242). Themes were identified using a ‘continuous part-to-whole’ and ‘whole-to-part’ movement, both within the data and between data and existing literature (Thompson et al., 1994:435).

As part of this data interpretation, we refined the analysis by incorporating language and concepts derived from relevant literature, moving the coding to an etic level (Belk et al., 2013). Moving from an emic level to an etic level helped us to ‘contextualise informants’ narratives in a broader sociocultural context’ (Fischer et al., 2007; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Thompson and Üstüner, 2015:243). During this process, themes and subthemes were examined to ensure that the coded data supported the themes. Themes were reviewed for their internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 1990), to ensure the data within the themes ‘cohered together meaningfully’, whilst there were ‘clear and identifiable distinctions between themes’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006:91). The themes illuminated informants’ accounts of their upbringing and journeys to motherhood, as well as their ongoing experiences of motherhood. To validate the accuracy of the findings, an overview of the key themes was shared with informants, eight of whom volunteered to give a second interview, in which they were invited to reflect on the findings. One informant also participated in further discussion of the thematic analysis, informing the interpretation of the data.

Findings and discussion

The findings are structured around our proposed model of how informants reflexively draw on the resources at hand to navigate potential liminal hotspots emerging from the transition to motherhood (see Figure 1). Starting on the left-hand side of the model, we show how informants, as reflexive bricoleurs, negotiate their identities on becoming a mother, outlining the three main overlapping systems of resources that informants drew on to negotiate their identities. These systems of resources include the marketplace system, South Asian cultural and family systems, and the medical/expert advice system (shown as overlapping circles in Figure 1).

In the subsequent sections, moving across the model, we outline two potential liminal hotspots which emerged at the intersection of these systems. We examine how informants navigated these liminal hotspots, which differed in their potential to produce ongoing liminality. The first hotspot relates to nesting consumption and South Asian cultural practices surrounding birth. The second emerges from competing forms of expert advice. We show how the mothers negotiated these liminal hotspots by engaging in different forms of reflexive bricolage.

Figure 1¹

[INSERT FIGURE ONE AROUND HERE]

Reflexive bricoleurs

As reflexive bricoleurs, informants are ‘skilled cultural navigators’ (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016:47) and ‘post-assimilationist consumers’ (Askegaard et al., 2005) who reflexively negotiate their identities at the intersection of South Asian and British culture (Lindridge and Hogg 2006). Informants reflected on how they were socialised within South Asian family

¹ Figure 1 depicts mothers as reflexive bricoleurs negotiating multiple systems of resources during the transition to motherhood. The arrows show how two liminal hotspots emerge at the intersection of these systems, with differing potential to become permanent. These hotspots require different forms of reflexive bricolage, which helps the mothers to develop their mothering identity as experts on their own child.

hierarchies in which collectivist cultural values and traditional gender norms persisted (Bhopal, 1998; Erdirishinga et al. 2015). For example, first-time mother Jasvinder remembered how, as a child and young woman, she was expected to help her mother with domestic and caring responsibilities, and felt 'exposed' and constantly judged by her family members far more than her brother.

However, as informants negotiated their identities between two cultures (Askegaard et al. 2005; Jafari and Goulding 2008; Jamal and Chapman 2000; Lindridge et al. 2004), they began to 'engage in complex forms of resistance, negotiation and compromise' in terms of education, marriage and careers (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016: 43). Consider the case of Nabeela, a second-generation Indian Muslim, who from the age of thirteen had to move from a local secondary school to a private Muslim girls' school, where the school day finished at twelve thirty in the afternoon. This change made her available to help her mother, who had become unwell whilst expecting her fifth child. When Nabeela was eighteen, she negotiated with her father to allow her to leave the family home to live and study at a university many miles from home. Her father grappled with his decision over a significant period: at first, he allowed her to live away for just over the first year of her studies, however, he later changed his mind and 'insisted' that she quit her studies. At the time, Nabeela felt powerless to challenge the situation: 'I felt like I was left with no choice...he basically once he put his foot down that was it'. Her father's decision was something that Nabeela still finds upsetting to this day, referring to this episode of her life as part of her 'scarred past'. Nevertheless, even though it meant repeating a year, Nabeela convinced him to allow her to transfer to a university closer to home, so that she could live with her cousin while she studied. She was determined that her younger sisters would not experience the same situation: 'I said to my sister...if push comes to shove...don't listen to dad'. She reflected that through 'pushing' for her education, she managed to find a compromise: 'back then obviously I didn't know rebellion existed, but I do now'.

Similarly, Ashira, a third-generation British Pakistani woman whose first child was three years old, reflected on how she persuaded her parents that she wanted to study engineering. Although ‘there was a lot more restriction’ placed on her as ‘the first girl, the first-born to go to uni’, she felt proud of how she was ‘pushing the boundaries’, which she saw as worthwhile both for herself, as the main breadwinner in her household, but also as a role-model for her younger sisters (Ramji, 2007). Informants were reflexively ‘engaged in complex negotiations with their parents’, which lead to ‘compromise, resistance and change’ in relation to going to university, where to study and marriage (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016: 55; 53).

In other cases, informants engaged in complex negotiations to justify their post-graduate education. For example, Jasvinder, described how she ‘had to fight’ to study for her doctorate, which her parents saw as ‘problematic’ as she had already spent four years at university. Similarly, Chanda’s parents refused to offer financial support for her to pursue a professional qualification, but were happy to fund her brother despite him quitting several courses. As a result, these women described having to ‘fight’ for their post-graduate qualifications, as their parents withheld financial support. Often, these informants felt their parents were concerned because they were keen for daughters to marry and start a family. Raveena reflected that this concern was part of the role of a traditional South Asian mother:

...my mum...was a bit more concerned about...when are you going to get married and have kids and what if you incur problems...It's an Asian mentality...she just...wants the best for you...and the best, in her mind, is for you to be married and settled, and you have kids.

As this excerpt illustrates, in some cases, it was informants’ mothers who were rather ambivalent in their support. Some women felt their mothers were torn between supporting their daughters and ensuring their daughters marry and start a family. Raveena resisted pressure from

her mother, by reassuring her mother that she had a ‘five year plan’, to find a husband, then complete her PhD, enabling her to fit her career aspirations around marriage and starting a family. These cases show how informants have learned to negotiate conflicting ideals, resulting in ‘complex inter-weavings of collective ethnic identification, religion and gendered expectations’ (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016: 53).

Throughout their life-course, informants learned to negotiate conflicting ideals by engaging in reflexivity, so that they can critically select resources to draw on or reject (Cronin and Malone, 2018). For example, having negotiated access to higher education, informants like Ashira and Raveena learned to resist and challenge their parents’ views surrounding marriage. Informants’ previous negotiations surrounding access to higher education, marriage and work has enabled informants to develop a reflexive understanding of the different systems of resources available to them to negotiate their identities (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016; Lindridge and Hogg, 2006). For example, informants learned to select, amalgamate and discard different understandings of ‘culture’ and ‘religion’, as Jameela reflected: ‘it’s culture, not religion, that says that the girl should be at home and she should stay at home and the men go out for work’.

Through the often challenging and uncertain process of becoming a mother, informants typically performed bricolage through their ability to draw on a variety of resources available to them to develop new understandings and identities as mothers (Altglass, 2014). For example, Marjana explained that she had learned to select the ‘good parts of culture and religion’. Similarly, Chanda reflected that she could take what was good from ‘the different cultures that we live in, as well as influences from the temple’, giving her the ‘best of both worlds’.

On becoming mothers, informants learned to differentiate between what they perceived as the most supportive resources from the different systems of resources available at hand. As reflexive bricoleurs at the intersection of two cultures, they could access a diverse ‘cultural

toolkit' that enabled them to improvise how they engaged with marketplace resources (Rindova et al., 2011:413). This toolkit enabled them to engage in different ways to their white middle-class counterparts (Afflerback et al., 2014:2; Prothero, 2002; Thomsen and Sorensen, 2006). For example, as Madina explained: 'I like to separate culture and religion, you know, part of the culture is to stay at your mother's house for 40 days', which she saw as 'a chill-out period where basically people do everything for you...you just look after your baby'. These women often did not feel the need to 'nest' by purchasing everything they needed before birth. Instead, they prioritised the resources available from the South Asian cultural and family systems, which rendered them less susceptible to the heightened feelings of consumption-induced liminality which many mothers experience (Ogle et al., 2013; Thomsen and Sorensen, 2006). For example, Ashira decided to only buy 'the basics' because she knew that after the birth, her sisters and brother could buy whatever she needed:

So when I came home, everything was set up, it was perfect...when you come home, relatives and distant cousins and people in the community, they all come to visit... they either bring flowers or sweets, or they bring... I mean they bring you cash, they have to give cash, it's the thing. So I was raking it in, she was raking it in. Yes so it's cultural stuff. (Ashira).

The excerpt captures how informants like Ashira did not see themselves as 'contesting ideological structures', or as mothers who needed to provide an 'alibi' for their consumption choices (Cronin and Malone, 2018:2-3). Yet she and others were reflexively aware of the resources that she and her family would receive from the South Asian cultural and family system. As Namra explained: 'I decided that we'd do a lot of our shopping afterwards, because I knew that we'd be getting lots of presents, and I'd have a better idea of what I wanted once [the baby] arrived'. Rather than seeking to display 'unruliness' or 'tactical disruption', as 'unruly bricoleurs' (Cronin and Malone, 2018:5-6), informants acted as reflexive bricoleurs,

by prioritising the different systems of resources at hand to negotiate their new identities as mothers.

When informants experienced more difficulties in negotiating competing forms of expert advice, they learned to interweave their skills and resources (Tonner, 2016:116), and discard resources that did not work for them. They encountered powerful, interlocking norms surrounding the consumption of expert advice within both the medical expert advice system and South Asian cultural and family systems. For example, contrary to the midwife's advice, Shaheera experimented with traditional remedies such as honey water, as well as swaddling her baby. Yet they also learned to discard unhelpful advice and comments from family members, as Nabeela explains:

It's this whole Asian mother comparison thing sometimes, and that can drive you nuts... I was getting was oh how are you doing, is she sleeping on her own okay? Oh, she should really be sleeping on her own by now, you know, those types of things. At a point when I was, kind of, more vulnerable I thought to myself oh God maybe they're right...and then things got better because I started thinking to myself I'm happy with [the baby] in our room... so it's about being flexible and learning when to be a bit more stern.

As reflexive bricoleurs, they amalgamated the available resources from multiple, overlapping resource systems, by creating a reflexive space in which to become experts on their own child (Thomson et al., 2008). The following section outlines these overlapping systems of resources in more detail.

Multiple systems of resources during the transition to motherhood

The marketplace system

The marketplace system denotes the abundance of marketplace resources relating to the transition to motherhood, including maternity and baby products such as prams, cots, nursery equipment (Voice Group, 2010b). Informants were typically aware of the array of baby products and services, which contributed to uncertainty in their new life role. On becoming pregnant, informants often initially felt overwhelmed by the new 'consumer world' that they were entering (Voice Group 2010a:382). Many felt 'taken by surprise' by the variety of items to consider, and the amount of knowledge needed to make purchases (Voice Group 2010a:383). As Anita explained: 'it was hard to get my head around, I had no idea what I was buying... I didn't know that certain babies don't want to lay back, and certain prams don't move certain ways, and space in the [car] boot.' Similarly, Shaheera reflected that: 'I was nervous, I was scared...I didn't know what I'd need, you don't know until you need it... I just got the essentials because actually you can go out and buy after you've had [the baby]'. Naeema also encountered consumption uncertainty which was linked to her lack of knowledge about her new life-role as a mother: 'there's so many [prams] on the market, and it's difficult when you have no prior experience of what will be a good function, what other functions a pram is supposed to do'. As Madina, whose first child was three months old, explained: 'we've overcomplicated parenthood...it's nice to have the choice but you can feel a bit overwhelmed'.

However, informants dealt with this uncertainty in a different way to their white, middle-class counterparts (Afflerback et al., 2014; Miller, 2014; Voice Group 2010a). Rather than turning to the market to demonstrate their readiness for the baby, most informants were reflexive of the role that marketplace resources played in shaping their maternal identity. For Madina, deciding to source most of her baby items from family and friends helped her to feel more in control of what she bought and when:

I'm glad we kept it really simple because I could have easily done the whole thing and bought everything, but in a way, having been given gifts and

second hand stuff makes it ok when you have to buy the emergency stuff that you have to buy, like the breast pump.

Madina went on to explain that she could have got ‘carried away’ with purchasing baby products before birth. Although she nevertheless encountered some uncertainty after birth with regards to infant feeding, that she had not anticipated (i.e. the need for ‘emergency stuff’), she was glad she had not ‘forked out loads already’. Similarly, Naeema was aware that a pram was ‘a really expensive purchase...I remember it cost more than our car at the time’. She chose to delay purchasing her pram until she needed to move her baby from a sling, so that she had a ‘better idea’ of what she needed. Rafeeqa, whose twins were 18 months old, reflects that ‘you don’t know [what to buy] until you actually need it’. She chose to delay her purchases until after the birth: ‘you can go out and buy after you’ve had [the baby]’. In contrast to existing research (Ogle et al., 2013; Thomsen and Sorensen, 2006), Rafeeqa’s lack of certainty about what to buy did not continue to precipitate heightened feelings of liminality. Alternatively, informants navigated such consumption uncertainty by drawing on certain resources from the South Asian cultural and family systems, which we outline below.

The South Asian cultural and family systems

The South Asian cultural and family systems comprise the resources that derive from informants’ family hierarchies and South Asian cultural practices. Informants were typically able to draw on three main South Asian cultural practices surrounding birth. These practices, which often were inter-connected, include: remaining indoors for several weeks after the birth, staying at their mother’s house during the postnatal period, and gift-giving. As Nabeela (1 child aged 19 months) explained:

Traditionally what happens when you have a kid in most Asian households is you go to your mum’s house... you go to your mum’s house so that your

mum can basically tell you to put your feet up and look after you... So generally in those 40 days [after birth] you'll not see many Asian women venture out, even, you know, just shopping trips or anything like that, you get them done for you.

In cases where informants did not go to stay with their mothers, they usually lived near their parents, and tended to receive daily support from their mothers and other female family members. These resources from within these women's family hierarchies (Wells and Dietsch, 2014) offered informants an alternative to marketplace resource to support their transition to motherhood.

A further key resource derived from the South Asian cultural and family systems is the role of expert advice from elder female family members. In South Asian cultures, advice from elder female family members traditionally holds a higher, expert status (Mumtaz and Salway, 2007; Wells and Dietsch, 2014). Older women are considered to be 'wise and experienced' (Mumtaz and Salway, 2007: 9), with 'cultural authority' traditionally residing with expectant women's 'mothers, mother-in-laws and other female relatives' (Miller, 2005: 38). Older women are considered to be the main source of knowledge regarding 'diet, conduct and taboos' both to protect the baby and aid the mother's recovery from birth (Wells and Dietsch, 2014:e5). Expectant mothers may submit to the instructions of female elders, who are seen as 'vested with the authority' to make decisions surrounding antenatal and postnatal care (Mumtaz and Salway, 2007:9; Wells and Dietsch, 2014).

As well as seeking to minimise risks to the mother and her baby, drawing on advice from elder female family members is linked to maintaining respect and harmony within the family hierarchy (Wells and Dietsch, 2014). Family responsibilities are central to South Asian identities through a combination of norms, values and practices such as showing warmth and

respect for parents, taking care of them and not being rebellious (Erdirishinga et al. 2015; Mehrotra and Calasanti, 2010). It is normal, if not expected, that close ties and ‘interdependent connectedness’ are maintained beyond immediate family to include extended family (Erdirishinga et al. 2015:479). Learning from their mother’s (and their mother-in-law’s) advice is intertwined with showing respect to elders, and is part of how a ‘good woman’ behaves (Mumtaz and Salway, 2007: 9; Wells and Dietsch, 2014). However, as we show next, the advice from elder female family members could overlap and can conflict with resources that are available through the medical/expert advice system.

The medical/expert advice system

The medical/expert advice system refers to the sources of expert advice that informants engaged with in order to demonstrate their ability to ensure their child’s safe arrival and development. Informants were often keen to draw on resources from midwives, GPs, health visitors, NHS websites and leaflets, much like many mothers (Kehily, 2014; Miller, 2005). There was some overlap with the marketplace system, with informants typically regarding baby/parenting manuals, magazines, websites and apps (e.g. Mumsnet, Babycentre, Emma’s Diary, Wonder Weeks, What to Expect) as valuable resources. For instance, Anita, whose first child was 18 months old, recalls how she ‘looked forward’ to seeing what was happening when. Having recently become a mother, Jasvinder felt that understanding her baby’s developmental stages both during pregnancy and after birth meant she could understand her baby’s needs more fully. While these baby development trackers helped informants to develop a relationship with their baby, they also reproduced the norms of intensive motherhood which deem mothers responsible for their child’s development (Kehily, 2014).

Informants used the medical expert advice system to modify their food consumption in order to minimise risks to their unborn child (Lupton, 2011). For example, Hashini, who was

expecting her first child, felt she ‘had to avoid certain things’ like tuna, nuts and caffeine and ‘tried to eat healthily’ by cutting down on sugary foods, eating more fruit and vegetables and taking vitamin and folic acid supplements. She used these resources ‘to check everything and see whether it was safe for the baby’. These women felt the need to draw on marketplace resources, ‘deferring to medical and child-rearing experts’ to ensure their child’s safe development (Hays, 1996; MacKendrick, 2014:5).

Having outlined the three key systems of resources available to informants, we show how these overlapping systems produced two potential liminal hotspots that emerged from the transition to motherhood. We discuss how each of these hotspots differed in its potential to induce ongoing liminality, requiring informants to perform different forms of reflexive bricolage.

Nesting consumption and South Asian cultural practices: a minimally liminal hotspot

In contrast to existing research, which suggests that consumption uncertainty during the transition to motherhood can engender ongoing liminality for some mothers (Phillips and Broderick, 2014), we suggest that uncertainty linked to nesting consumption was a minimally liminal hotspot for most informants. They could draw on resources from the South Asian cultural and family system to circumvent the need for nesting consumption. By choosing to follow South Asian cultural practices during the postnatal period, such as remaining indoors for several weeks after birth, many informants, including first-time mother Rafeeqa, and Mahira who was expecting her second child, chose to delay the purchase of baby products until after birth. As Mahira explains: ‘after the delivery, I can buy, like, a pram and stuff like that, and whatever I need’. Informants were temporally deparadoxifying the consumption uncertainty of knowing what to purchase (Greco and Stenner, 2017), until they were better able to determine what resources they would need.

As well as temporal deparadoxification (i.e. delaying purchases), South Asian cultural practices such as remaining indoors offered informants the opportunity to spatially deparadoxify their consumption uncertainty (Greco and Stenner, 2017). Informants' pram consumption exemplifies how many women could draw on marketplace resources without experiencing heightened liminality. In many cases, informants did not go to extensive efforts to buy the 'right pram' (Thomsen and Sorensen, 2006:920). Often, they were happy to source their pram via the family resource system, with family members gifting new or second-hand prams, as well as other large items such as cots, car seats and nursery furniture. As Ameena explains 'because we don't wanna go out, and people were giving stuff as well, I had everything I needed'. Informants like Ameena did not feel the 'the weight of cultural expectations that they would be able to accumulate the right things in preparation for the birth of their babies' (Voice Group 2010a:383). Informants' confusion of how to consume baby products was minimised by drawing on South Asian cultural practices which become spatial and temporal resources of deparadoxification. By choosing to spend the postnatal period within the relatively private space of the home, informants deferred their re-entry into the public sphere of the marketplace until they felt ready. In this minimally liminal hotspot, these forms of reflexive bricolage helped to 'restore boundaries' that enabled informants to overcome the uncertainty and confusion that perpetuate liminality (Greco and Stenner, 2017:154).

Consuming competing forms of expert advice: a liminal hotspot with high potential

When informants encountered a hotspot with a much higher potential to engender permanent liminality, they used different forms of reflexive bricolage. The first part of this section shows how the consumption of competing forms of expert advice displayed key features of a liminal hotspot (Greco and Stenner, 2017). We then consider how reflexive bricolage produced a pattern shift that enabled informants to resignify how they saw themselves as mothers (Greco

and Stenner, 2017). In doing so, informants developed a reflexive space in which they could learn to view themselves as ‘organic experts’ on their own child (Thomson et al., 2008).

Paradox, paralysis and polarisation

While the consumption of expert advice was an integral part of informants’ transition to motherhood, the women were negotiating competing advice from two main systems of resources: medical expert advice and advice from South Asian elder female generations. There is a sharp contrast between UK and South Asian ‘notions of authoritative knowledge and associated practices’ surrounding pregnancy and birth (Miller, 2005:32). Yet both Western and South Asian norms of intensive mothering converge around a paradox in the sense that mothers are deemed responsible for ensuring their child’s development, by following competing forms of expert advice and modifying their consumption practices accordingly.

Family hierarchies often intensified informants’ feelings of being ultimately responsible for their child’s development. As Parminder reflected: ‘if the child starts suffering with gas, it’s always blamed on the mother...you’re not eating right, you need to eat right’. Paradoxically, such expert advice remained highly influential for informants, despite also deferring to the increasing authority of formal, medical expert advice (Miller, 2005; Mumtaz and Salway, 2007; Wells and Dietsch, 2014). This ‘paradox’, a key feature of a liminal hotspot, arose ‘from attending to the requirements of two mutually incompatible’ forms of mothering at the intersection of two cultures (Greco and Stenner, 2017:155).

Faced with this paradox, informants typically felt paralysed and bombarded with a range of ‘dos and don’ts’ from family and medical experts once they became pregnant. The sense of paralysis, a key feature of a liminal hotspot (Greco and Stenner, 2017), was exemplified by Parminder, whose only child was four years old. She recalled how ‘no matter what...there’s always a lot of restrictions on the mother’. Informants struggled to balance between the

polarities of advice from within the female hierarchy, and ‘scientific’ forms of expert advice, both of which reproduce norms of intensive motherhood. As Parminder explained, ‘there was a lot of fight between me and my mother, between the old and the new’, as her mother’s advice often conflicted with what her doctor advised. Similarly, Anita, whose first child was 18 months old, recalled how she felt torn between advice from elder female family members, which she saw as ‘authoritative’, and advice from health professionals, which left her with ‘that lingering doubt’ as to which advice to follow. Informants experienced polarisation, a further key feature of a liminal hotspot (Greco and Stenner, 2017:155), as they struggle to ‘make a viable choice’ between the conflicting forms of advice, which amplified the paradox.

If performing mundane mothering practices at the intersection of two cultures can perpetuate ongoing liminality (Cappellini and Yen, 2016), we have shown how the negotiation of competing forms of advice exemplified how such liminal hotspots can emerge. Yet, as reflexive bricoleurs, informants’ ability to draw on the resources at hand enabled them to realise not only the negative ‘swamping tendencies of liminal hotspots’, but also the latent, ‘more positive and creative potentialities’ of liminal hotspots (Greco and Stenner, 2017:156).

Pattern shift: Forming a space for reflexive bricolage

To navigate this liminal hotspot, a key form of reflexive bricolage involved the ability to draw on existing and new support networks to form a space in which informants could engage in pattern shift. Informants were typically part of several different support networks, often including their existing networks, for example, a group of siblings (especially sisters), in-laws, friends and groups of other mothers they knew (e.g. friends, workmates). For example, Rafeeqa was ‘still in touch with the friends from the [neonatal unit at] hospital’, as well as having ‘a very good support network with my mum, sisters, with my neighbours’. They engaged in

network bricolage (Baker et al., 2003), drawing on their current networks at hand, as well as developing new networks of mothers (e.g. from playgroups, antenatal classes).

These support networks facilitated a *communitas* (Turner, 1967), a safe and supportive space in which they could reflect on their mothering practices (Cappellini and Yen, 2016; Tonner, 2016). For example, Raveena, whose first child was a few months old, valued her support network: ‘there’s lots of sharing, you know, this is on cheap at this place, nappies are on sale here, KiddiCare just closed down’. Support networks also offered informants emotional support, through encouragement and empathy (Drentea and Moran-Cross, 2005). Fatima, mother of both a baby and a much older child, reflected on the ongoing value of her support network: ‘we sort of compare notes and try and encourage each other on how to bring them up’. Such *communitas*-seeking consumption (Tonner, 2016) played an important role in enabling informants to learn how to be reflexive of the different forms of advice and assert themselves as experts on their own child.

A key facilitator of network bricolage was the use of mobile phones and free messaging apps such as texting, Whatsapp and Facebook messaging. These apps are free and allow users to send each other messages, photos and web-links. Users can also form their own groups which allow conversations among group members to develop, with messages instantly sent to all members of the group, for free. These apps were a key way of engaging with multiple support networks, especially during the first few months when informants remained mostly indoors, like Raveena and Anita who were part of ‘midnight groups’ they could message at any time. Ashira, whose only child was three years old, reflected on how her support network has come to play a significant role in shaping her mothering identity: ‘we have a couple of WhatsApp groups, so we have group messages that go on all the time... so my siblings, I see them over the phone, face-to-face, in my dreams’. Rather than solely drawing on marketplace resources such as formal support groups, toddler groups and classes, informants like Ameena grew their

support networks as their family grows and expands, developing a fluid, reflexive space in which they could share ‘moans and groans about how hard it is’.

Messaging offered informants the opportunity to communicate quickly and at any time, day or night, as Anita explained: ‘I can pick it up, read, put it down and reply later’. Texting at all hours of the day, as part of a ‘midnight group’, was part of the camaraderie of early motherhood. Like the immigrant Taiwanese mothers in Cappellini and Yen’s (2016) study, informants found solidarity and comradeship from the *communitas* that emerged as part of their support networks. However, they were not turning to an online community to replace a lack or deficiency within their local support network or to offer escapism from their everyday lives (Cappellini and Yen, 2016). Instead, they were able to engage in network bricolage of multiple support networks, which provided a diverse, interstitial space in which they could learn to amalgamate competing forms of expert advice.

Pattern shift: An amalgamation of resources

As they reflected on the various, competing sources of expert advice at hand, informants became aware of gaps emerging between such expert advice and their lived experiences of early motherhood (Miller, 2005). For example Chanda, who had a 2 year-old, and was pregnant with her second child, reflected:

I went to all the... I managed to get all the right advice and speaking to everybody and... again, I read up about things and I bought that book, ‘What to Expect in the First Year’, so I'd like read, you know, look at the index and try and find solutions to the problems that I was having. But it's not textbook stuff, is it?

Informants began to engage in a pattern shift (Greco and Stenner, 2017), changing their perspective on the competing forms of advice they encountered. For example, Marjana, whose

children range from 11 years to two months old, talked about how she ‘started kind of thinking differently’ about how she sees herself as a mother. As reflexive bricoleurs, informants began to question, discard and amalgamate elements of both forms of expert advice. Informants were not necessarily moving away from formal medical advice in favour of (expert) advice based on other mothers’ experiences (Miller, 2005), but were becoming skilled at evaluating the different resources that were available to them. Consider Chanda’s narrative:

...if my mum came up with something then I would Google it on the internet, or I would try to find something to substantiate what she was saying. But I wouldn't just take it at face value, sort of thing, no... I just challenge what she says, sort of thing. Yes, unless, like, sometimes, it may be a valid point, but she doesn't back up well.

Informants experimented with contradicting forms of advice, on a ‘trial and error’ basis, and developed a blend of resources that worked for them and their child. They become confident in their own ability to solve problems based on the ‘toolbox’ of advice that they were gradually assembling (Hester, 2005:84). Through reflexive bricolage they were able to regard themselves as experts on their own child who could demonstrate their child’s healthy development (Thomson et al., 2008).

The narrative of becoming experts on their own child was ‘an important resource’ that the women drew upon ‘to retain or regain [a] positive maternal identity’ (Lee, 2007:1087). As a new mother, Raveena felt that she was becoming reflexive of how she constructs her identity as a mother:

...that good mum label, you can kind of throw it away because you don’t have to justify being a good mum to anyone else other than yourself...you

know in yourself what you're capable of, what your baby should be doing and shouldn't be doing.

Informants regarded the different sources as open to further re-interpretation and amalgamation. Nabeela, whose first child was 19 months old, recalled how she found the first few months of becoming a mother very difficult, until she 'stopped reading everything, stopped listening to everyone'. She felt that 'things got better' once decided to only seek specific help when she felt it was necessary. Nabeela learned to focus on advice that 'suggested solutions' and discarded less relevant advice: 'you just, kind of, listen to it and nod your head and let it go out the other ear'. Once informants had begun to engage in pattern shift, they became more confident in evaluating the competing systems of resources available to them. When faced with a higher potential for ongoing liminality to emerge, informants engaged in forms of reflexive bricolage that enabled pattern shift, by creating a reflexive space in which to evaluate resources and learning how to amalgamate competing resources.

Conclusion

Theoretical implications

In this paper, we have advanced understanding of consumer identity and the relationship between ongoing liminality and life transitions, by drawing on the concept of liminal hotspots (Greco and Stenner, 2017), alongside a reflexive bricolage approach to negotiating identity. Two different liminal hotspots, which vary in their potential to produce ongoing liminality, are discerned. By viewing consumers as reflexive bricoleurs who drew on multiple systems of resources, we identified the different ways in which consumers negotiated these liminal hotspots.

We have identified how consumers can engage in reflexive bricolage to temporally and spatially deparadoxify a minimally liminal hotspot (Greco and Stenner, 2017). Our findings

suggest that, for most informants, nesting consumption was a minimally liminal hotspot. Extending the literature on motherhood and liminality (Cappellini and Yen 2016; Phillips and Broderick, 2014; Voice Group, 2010a) we have shown how minimally liminal hotspots can render ethnic minority mothers less vulnerable to experiencing consumption-induced liminality than their white, middle-class counterparts (Voice Group 2010a). As reflexive bricoleurs, we have also shown how consumers can draw on systems of resources that enable them to spatially and/or temporally ‘supply boundaries’ between themselves and the marketplace, enabling them to minimise the effects of liminal hotspots (Greco and Stenner, 2017:154).

However, we have also offered insight into how life transitions can produce liminal hotspots with a higher potential to engender ongoing liminality. We have shown how some liminal hotspots are more difficult to negotiate, and can be identified when consumers experience paradox, paralysis and polarisation (Greco and Stenner, 2017). We have shown how consumers can engage in pattern shift and reflexive bricolage, which enables them to develop reflexive spaces in which they can amalgamate competing resources and develop new identities. Our findings have extended existing research (Cappellini and Yen, 2016) on ethnic minority mothers’ experiences of liminality. Although ethnic minority mothers are ‘constantly in-between different spaces of mothering’ (Cappellini and Yen, 2016:1279), we have shown how consumers can encounter different liminal hotspots, and can learn to draw on the different systems of resources ‘at hand’ to become experts on their own child (Hester, 2005:82; Thomson et al., 2008). Since migration is increasingly a feature of late-modern life, it is likely that increasing numbers of ethnic minority women may find themselves negotiating similar liminal hotspots that persist beyond the transition to motherhood.

Practical implications

For marketing practitioners, our findings suggest important differences in the ways in which mothers manage ongoing consumption uncertainties beyond the transition to motherhood. Marketers need to understand how consumers negotiate different types of liminal hotspots following life transitions, altering their consumption patterns, such as delaying purchases/re-entry into the marketplace, or sourcing items through different resource systems such as the family. Depending on how they negotiate different types of liminal hotspots, consumers may respond differently to products targeted towards their new identity position.

Our findings encourage marketing managers to reconsider underlying assumptions about women, particularly ethnic minority women, to ensure that they support these women as they attempt to negotiate ongoing liminality and learn to view themselves as competent mothers (Lindridge et al., 2016). While ethnic minority consumers might find themselves experiencing ‘permanent’ states of ‘in-between-ness’ (Cappellini and Yen, 2016), some aspects of ongoing liminality can be more easily minimised than those requiring a greater shift in perspective to amalgamate resources. When segmenting and targeting consumers, marketers need to understand the dynamic ways in which consumers engage with intersecting and competing systems of resources, alongside the marketplace, such as cultural and family systems, and the medical/expert advice system.

In a contemporary consumer culture characterised by fluid migration and communication, marketers should consider whether their marketing programmes further exacerbate these overlapping systems of resources. For example, how can marketers communicate their products to ethnic minority mothers in ways that recognise competing norms of good motherhood? How can marketers promote reflexivity in terms of competing norms, or capture the wider role of family and support networks? Marketers and social policy makers should recognise the importance of develop informal support networks and discursive spaces (Cruz and Buchanan-

Oliver, 2017), both online and offline, as reflexive spaces in which to accept, reject and amalgamate competing resources.

Limitations and future research

While our article offers important insights into consumer identities and ongoing liminality, despite attempts to recruit a more diverse sample, the sample largely comprised second-generation Muslim women, and most informants were graduates. These women are likely to share similar experiences in negotiating their identities between two cultures (Lindridge et al., 2004). Future research might recruit samples of South Asian women with differing levels of education and access to different systems of resources, for example, or focus on South Asian heritage mothers in contexts that are typically characterised by more egalitarian gender norms (e.g. Sweden, Norway). It would also be of interest to investigate how other ethnic minority groups experience ongoing liminality, for example Black, East Asian or Hispanic mothers who occupy minority positions in various different (Eastern and Western) contexts. Extending recent research on migrant masculinities (Cruz and Buchanan-Oliver, 2017), future research could examine the role of liminal hotspots for ethnic minority fathers. Given the increasingly fluid patterns of migration, future research might also focus on other minority groups, such as transnational and/or interfaith families, as well as recognising changing family forms, such as single parents, blended families or same-sex couples. Interviewing both parents (Lindridge et al., 2016), or focussing on fathers alone may also offer valuable insight into our understanding of ongoing liminality.

The findings could also have implications for consumers who are experiencing liminality in other situations in which there are complex systems of resources to navigate. Future research could explore the dynamics of liminal hotspots in other contexts in which consumers may feel ‘trapped’ in ‘interstitial dimensions’, such as consumers experiencing undiagnosed illnesses or

bereavement, or consumers who experience liminality on a cyclical basis such as yoyo dieters or addicts (Greco and Stenner, 2017:152; Hirschman et al., 2012). Finally, while our analysis focuses at an individual level, our approach may also offer fruitful insights into how consumers experience liminal hotspots at a collective level, such as during periods of uprising or revolution (Al-Abdin et al., 2016; Scott Georgsen and Thomassen, 2017), or periods of stalled transition, such as the UK's exit from the European Union (Brexit). In conclusion, as liminal hotspots 'constitute an endemic feature of societies characterised by permanent liminality', our approach offers a means of capturing both the creative potential, as well as the 'swamping tendencies' of liminal hotspots (Greco and Stenner, 2017:162, 156; Szakolczai, 2003).

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